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# THE GREAT QUESTION

## TWELVE LESSONS IN THE FAITH

BY

EPHRAIM CHAMBERLAIN CUMMINGS

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*This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him  
whom He hath sent. John vi. 29.*

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## INTRODUCTION.

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If these twelve lessons are too serious to be easily entertaining, they are also too short to be very fatiguing. They were prepared in the belief that to think soberly is indispensable to a pious disposition. A man's Christian life is not likely, for the time, to be better than his ideas and thoughts about Christ and His teaching. The lessons are for those who want to think soberly ; for those who, like the "Catechumens" in the primitive church, have the hearing ear as well as ears to hear.

Early in the Christian era, when "Catechumens," having been taught the elements of religion by word of mouth, were about to become "Believers" or "Faithful,"—in other words, to come into

full communion in the church, not only their knowledge but their life was inquired into, "whether they have fulfilled every good work." Yet their instruction was not made up of moral precepts alone. They were initiated into the history of revelation, in the words of Bunsen, "from Adam, the father of mankind, and Abraham, in whom all nations were blessed, down to Christ, whose life and death formed the centre of this hallowed history of the human race."

We of this day also begin life in the family and Sunday-school as "Catechumens," with a view to our becoming, in due time, established in the faith and members in full communion of the Christian church. It is common to teach the Bible to the young in Sunday-school lessons taken here and there. But the course of revelation in the progress of mankind, the "hallowed history of the human race," is perhaps not duly impressed upon us. What else is there so

important, and at the same time so little attended to, as the historic connection of God's teaching from first to last: how He appears as beginning, continuing and fulfilling His word, in order that we might be led to begin, continue and fulfill our faith?

Hence the plan of these lessons. It was needful that each should present a view somewhat distinct and full in itself; and, of course, the general progress could only be from one point of view to another: the aim being to exhibit the one reality of divine revelation in its most vital and self-evident aspects; and so, by leading on toward a fullness of understanding and motive, to help the advance of earnest young disciples from early training to confirmed Christian character.

Such as the effort is, I offer it to good learners in our Sunday-schools with an extract from the ancient prayers of the

church of Antioch, as recorded by St. Chrysostom :

“Let us pray earnestly for the Catechumens, that the all-loving and all-merciful God may hear their prayer ; that he may open the ears of their hearts, in order that they may perceive what no eye hath seen, no ear hath heard, and what is not come into the heart of any one ; that He may teach them the word of truth, and that He may sow in their hearts the seed of the fear of God ; that He may strengthen the faith in their hearts ; that He may reveal to them the gospel of righteousness ; that He may give them a godlike mind, pure thoughts, and a virtuous life, always to think what is of God, to meditate what is of God, to care for what is of God.”

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## THE GREAT QUESTION.

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LITTLE CHILDREN, LET NO MAN DECEIVE YOU ; HE  
THAT DOETH RIGHTEOUSNESS IS RIGHTEOUS.—  
1 *John iii.* 7.

**W**HAT is the great question?  
The great question for every  
person is, "What shall I do?"

Is it not, "What shall I do to be  
saved?"

Yes ; only, there is no being saved to  
be thought about otherwise than as in-  
separably one with our doing what we  
ought to do. We are made to do.  
Something is given us to enjoy, and  
something is given us to suffer ; but it  
is what we do in enjoying or in suffering  
that settles the question whether either  
is good for us or not. Conduct is the  
great thing.

We live in doing. All my powers are mine in my using of them. If I use them ill, I degrade them, and put them to doing something worse than what they might have done. Therefore, if I am to be, I must do. If I am to be my best, I must do my best. What shall I do? It is the whole question of duty, and as such it is the whole question of destiny.

Now see if this is not important. The question of duty is peculiarly mine and mine always. It is that blessed inquiry wherein my nature may take counsel all the time with the mind that is above me. But destiny is far reaching, liable at any instant to take in new conditions, and is altogether too vast and complex to be detailed. It is in the power and grace of Him who made and governs all. And so it is safe. It is good for us, strangers in the earth and inexperienced in life, to ask God not to hide His commandments



from us ; and it is equally good to commit all our interests to His keeping in the way of hearty obedience. Seek what you ought to do, and do it, however hard it may be ; but whatever else you do, fail not to have confidence in God as to everything that can befall you. "Salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks."

"What shall I do?" is the question of simple loyalty. But, "what shall I do to be saved?"—"what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?"—"what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"—these questions may indicate a working toward simplicity and loyalty, and they may imply a self-seeking which is our great sin and danger. What shall I do? is the question of those who listened to John the Baptist, the question of those who were pricked in the heart by the words of Peter, the question of the straight-forward and conscientious Saul prostrate before the first vision of his

**King.** Is it not better than the question of the jailor at Philippi, better than the question of the young man who went away sorrowful, or the question of the lawyer who wanted to put our Lord to the test of an examination? Why ask special guarantees or particular terms of our perfect Sovereign? If we cannot trust our bodies and souls in His keeping, it is better to suffer the pains of doubt and fear until we can. Our question is, "What shall I do?"

The question may come out at particular instants with regard to special acts. But the question reaches to everything. There is no power and no relation which it does not take in. What shall this organ do? It shall do whatever it was made to do, if it be perfectly played upon. We are played upon by every touch of God's fingers reaching us through His works. We shall do what we were intended to do, if we do what his touch demands. It should be one music going

up in the sounds of industry, and in the voices of worship. Every creature is made to serve a purpose, and that purpose takes in the right action of all powers, whether high or low. You must have your daily bread; what shall you do to gain it? Here is a great question. But it is great chiefly because it comes in as a part of that other question of what you shall do, namely, what you shall do for the life that is more than meat and for the bread that cometh down from heaven. Very little, indeed, does it signify what we eat and drink, or wherewithal we are clothed, if we are to have nothing to do with the kingdom of God and righteousness. But all interests are covered by the great question, because the question has regard to all our doings.

What we do is all we know about what we are. We judge ourselves always, and we shall always be judged according to our doings. The great

question takes due account of various distinctions in the same thing. We talk of toiling and resting, of working and waiting, of hearing and obeying, of believing and acting. We understand how these different words explain and support each other; we understand, also, that they all go together to set forth the one reality of doing. Not to do one thing is to do something else; and whatever you do, it indicates something else that you have done or will do. For the three disciples not to watch with Jesus in the garden was to fall asleep through the weakness of the flesh. That was what they did. It seemed too little to do, but it was proof of something else. They were sleeping for sorrow—the natural force exhausted by the grief of their spirits—not the flesh ruling by reason of their hardness of heart. But all that they were was in what they were doing. For Peter not to trust his destiny with Jesus when he

had been permitted to go to meet Him on the water was to feel the dread of sinking in the waves. When, of a sudden, he found his faith small and his fear great, he did not take time to ask what he should do; he did what he could do. He cried, "Lord, save me."

So we see very clearly at last that the great question brings us into great fellowship. It is not for a human creature to ask or answer the great question by himself alone. If the great question is pressing into our thoughts, it is because a thought infinitely greater and better than any of ours is working in our mind. Think what things are in the Bible, and you will begin to see what interest God takes in the question of what we shall do. He is always calling upon men to do what is right, because not to do what is right is to do what is wrong. He is ever inviting us to work with Him—not as if He had some great project for using our efforts, and were

leaving us to drive a bargain for our welfare, but as if our welfare were unspeakably dear to Him, and not to be secured without our doing as He directs.

When the tempter tried to draw Jesus away from doing the will of the Father into doing something else, his great pretense was that Jesus would gain something or save Himself trouble thereby. He took the Saviour into a high mountain to give Him large views, and suggested a fatal venture as a way of winning great glory. But Jesus trying to induce us to do the will of the Father, takes us to heavenly heights, where the kingdoms of this world and the glory of them look very small, and where, though He never conceals from us the risks we run, the sufferings of this present time seem small also. He wants us to be with Him and doing the things that He says. He is called Saviour; but He offers no salvation but in offering service in

His kingdom. He is the King that takes account of His servants. He is the Husbandman that hires laborers in His vineyard. He is the Master who pays the penny a day, and the Lord who welcomes the good and faithful servant to His own joy. He is the Wonder-worker, who teaches men what they are to do that they may work the works of God; and He is the Fountain of life, out of whom goeth virtue to heal and invigorate those who touch Him and those whom He touches.

The great question may divide itself into many questions. What shall I do? This asks, What has been done for me? What have I done? What is proposed to be done for me now? What am I ready to do? Questions these on which we may say something, if God permit. But meanwhile we must do something; and whatever else we may be ignorant of, there is evermore this most precious and comfortable duty for us to do: We

are to believe and be sure that our God and Saviour doeth all things well. It is not for us to pass a day of this mortal life without the joy of faith in God. Living in this faith we shall find not even the cloudless heaven of summer so sweet or so beautiful as the prayer which this faith sends up, beginning with

*“ Our Father, who art in Heaven.”*



## II.

WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN DONE MORE TO MY  
VINEYARD, THAT I HAVE NOT DONE IN IT?—  
*Isaiah v. 4.*

WHOEVER asks the great question does not ask it of empty space or of idle beings. The great answer anticipates our great question, in order that we may have real and prompt replies day by day, according to the inquiries we make.

In this way it comes to pass, that "What shall I do?" is always concerned with another question, namely, "What has been done for me?"

"Son, go work to-day in my vineyard." Our Lord does not say in the parable that each of the two sons was asking in so many words "what shall I do?"

But He does lead us to think that no indolence or thoughtlessness on the part of the sons, such as might keep them from seriously asking the great question, would hinder the good and prudent father from giving them a serious answer to the question unasked.

But the father could not say, "Son, go work to-day in my vineyard," unless he had made such provision for giving his son something to do as would justify the command. What must the father have done?

He must have made ready the vineyard.

He must have set in order some things to be done.

He must have brought up his son to do the kind of work required of him.

Now if you will read the parable referred to, in the twenty-first chapter of Matthew, you will find that it is just as true and just as plain when you take its higher meaning as when you take its

lower meaning. In fact, the two meanings are one. What is done by the Creator and Father of all for His children, however far it may reach beyond our thoughts, is just as simply kind and well meaning in its nature, as anything that could have been done for his children by the man who had two sons. For, what has been done for every one of us by our Creator?

He has made ready the world in which we are.

He has set in order the things for us to do.

He has brought us up to do the kind of work required of us.

It is strictly true, then, that everything has been done for us. It is by the seal of our Heavenly Father's love, and by the signs of His wise forecast in the things done by Him, that we are to be assured of what things He would have us do.

But this truth is very general. **It is**

without bounds, like the air, and we cannot take it all in. Yes; and like the air, it is near and pressing also, so that we cannot help taking it in, according to our measure. For, as we can breathe the air without need of knowing how far it extends, and yet the air must be everywhere lest we should come to a place where no breathing could go on; so the truth, of which we cannot help knowing something, must be infinite as the wisdom of God,—or it could not be the soul's living breath—always and everywhere ready to flow in with our common thoughts.

The air is a life-giving presence. Whither shall one go from this presence? Whither shall one flee from this breath? Go up above the clouds; the air is there. Go down into the deepest caverns; the air has rushed in before. Take the wings of the wind and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; the same breath of God preserves and up-

holds you. Day and night the air is with you. Every breathing creature takes it in, and lets it go out, only to take it in again. Coming in the air always brings new life; and it bears away from us the seeds of death as it goes out.

Do we say—we cannot understand the air because it is so large? No; but because it is so large we can understand it. If there were not the upper air, we could not have the lower air. But since there is the air everywhere—coming in and going out, sweeping hither and thither in great gales and gentle breezes, that it may be kept pure and lively—we can work with the air: we can build houses to shelter us from rough winds; we can let fresh air in as fast as foul air goes out; we can feel through the air the sweet warmth of the summer sun; or, if it be winter, we can have a fire to bring special sunshine into house and heart;—and all because the

air is so great with the greatness of God, and so ready to do the will of God for us ; while the sun shines for us, and the forests grow for us, and the coal is treasured up for us, and all things work together for us.

The air is the gift of love, but God is Love. When the wind was too rough on the lake, our Saviour rebuked the wind. Can you not almost hear Him saying, "Hush, O wind, you were meant for good, and now you seem likely to do mischief?" Thus Love works with the air, when the tempest is stilled, and when succor is brought to the tempest-tossed. We breathe life and love in our native air, and when love is strong within us, we, in our way, can rebuke the rough winds and freezing cold by the help we carry to the poor and exposed.

Does the air ever let us off from our learning ? By no means. The tempest and the miasma are for love's sake :—

that we may gain the faith and wisdom to rebuke them when they would do us harm; or, that we may suffer the rebuke and correction which they will justly bring upon us, if we neglect their teaching. This air, which our Creator gives to keep us alive, is endowed with an energy to work with us and teach us how to live. It presses upon us its own proper service, and punishes our negligence and abuse.

Is not water our teacher also? Water is very great and marvellous. How vast, deep, fearful it is in oceans and seas; though so very beautiful by fertile shores. How it mounts into the air to meet the sun; and the atoms, that went up fearless and alone, come together and sail aloft in resplendent clouds. But, by and by, down it plunges in drops too heavy for the air to hold up; and then fields and woods are watered, brooks that run among the hills are merry, rivers flow on with full banks to the sea.

Thus all the time reservoirs are full, fountains gush out, streams run on, vapor flies up, showers or snows fall down—an endless round.

What could we do without the water-works of God? But with them we can have the water-works of man: we can have the cottage by the spring, the watering-place for cattle, the well dug deep, pipes to bring the water of lake or river to cities, and smaller pipes to distribute the water to all the houses.

Thus we can drink, or give to drink, a cup of cold water in the name of Him whose disciples we are. There is so much water for the express purpose of securing to every living thing the little it must have. Water means life and love. Water means abundance and distribution. Those are wells of salvation from which water is drawn. Without water we could not have the comfort of sunshine, the kindly fruits of the



earth—could not have the bread of life. With water, what gardens, fields and forests! What fruits pleasant to the sight and good for food! What does the rain from heaven teach? What do the fruitful seasons say? What are sun, moon and stars telling? All are but different letters of one word—God!

When the Word by whom all things were made, comes to us as a man, and begins to teach us our A B C—the letters and syllables of His name and character—how does He do it? He points to the things that are made. The air is like His teaching; for His words are spirit and life. He calls Himself the living bread, the living water, the life itself—yea, the resurrection of the dead. He is the Sun of Righteousness, and He is the bright and morning Star. He is the meaning of everything by itself, and of all things together in the whole creation of God.

We must not forget that in air, earth, fire and water there is brought to us the teaching of what to do and what not to do with these elements. In things that live and grow there is the teaching of what to do with things that live and grow. In laws and rulers and teachers there is instruction as to what we are to do with laws and rulers and teachers. But notice this especially:—We have teachers like ourselves, teachers of our own flesh and blood, teachers that speak to us in words that we can understand instantly ; that we may not be too slow, and suffer too much, in learning from the things that are made with nobody to tell us what the things mean. Thus all things are immeasurably more to you and me, because they have been so much to others. Others have gone before us and prepared our way. Truth treasured up in the universe of God has been sought out by docile, inquiring men ; and they have dealt it out to us,

line upon line and precept upon precept. The thought and experience of all thinking beings are for us—as inspiration, example, or warning.

Sleep in a close room all night, and the air becomes bad. But the sun rises; the air is fresh without; the birds sing; the dew is on the grass; what does it all mean? If you are sleeping heavily, the windows closed, you are not aware of what God is saying in the world's new day. But now comes a voice at the door or under the window. It may be the voice of father, mother, brother, sister, friend; yet the voice is of God, as much as the day is of God. The voice is for you. What does it say? It says just what nature says: "The sun is up; the air is sweet; the dew is like diamonds; the birds are in full chorus." You, heavy with sleep, are not asking "what shall I do?" The voice is not literally telling you what you shall do. But the voice stirs you up to doing. It

calls you up from the likeness of death to the reality of life.

Just so we, asleep in our flesh and untaught at first as to all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge in Jesus Christ and His blessed kingdom, are made to hear voices of prophets, voices of apostles—the voice of our Lord himself; that we may awake to the joy of thinking, of believing, of loving, of giving,—in short, of doing the will of God. Duty is boundless as light and eternal as life; and so it always waits around us, wherever we may be. It will not let us escape. Its voice is within us; its requirements are here, and they are there. We find God's service in the world of greatness and glory,—in the worship and wonder with which we follow the sun's course in his tabernacle or look up to the heights of the star-lit temple. We find God's service also in the world of little spaces and common cares,—in houses and gardens, in fields

and work-shops. Day uttereth speech unto day, and night unto night showeth knowledge. Though in one sense there is no speech, no language, and their voice is not heard; in another sense there is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their sound has gone out into all lands, and their words unto the ends of the world.

But what psalmist can recite the wonderful works of God on our behalf? And, were all human voices to join again and again in the chorus—"For His mercy endureth forever;"—what would that mean but that His praise and our service must also endure forever?

God has made it His glory to do everything for our good. He has made it our good to do all things to His glory. We live by air, by water, by bread; but not by these alone. We live by every word of God. There is the breath of grace

and truth for our spirits, the water of everlasting life for our souls, the bread that came down from Heaven—teaching us that our meat and drink is to do the will of the Father.

© Lord of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth  
in Thee.

### III.

WHAT IS THIS THAT THOU HAST DONE? *Gen. iii. 13.*

“THIS that thou hast done” may refer to a single outward act—to be taken account of as respects its motive and consequences.

Again, it may refer not merely to particular acts, but also to a habit of doing contracted in a course of action—the habit showing a physical tendency or moral disposition such as makes particular acts to be better understood.

What he has done is always of vital significance to the doer—whether, as compared with what has been done for him, or as respects what he shall do. We cannot have God’s work of creation without having God’s work of govern-

ment. The Creator has so surrounded us with his works, that we cannot move at all without having our doings combined with His operations. In this way our actions are perpetually followed up with consequences that take place according to God's will ; and His doing for us, far from being completed in an original creation, is continued without any interruption in the course of nature and history. Thus we have not only to learn at first what we ought to do by means of what has been done for us, but we are, at any time, to come to the knowledge of what we have been doing in the same way.

God is dealing with us as with children. He governs and disciplines us every day ; and his treatment of us must of course exhibit wise variations to suit the kind of character each of us is working out for himself. It is by Him indeed that parents and teachers here below are led to deal with each



child according to what is due to that child.

How very soon the story of the things that were originally made is ended in the Holy Scriptures! It is like one blessed week of holy innocency—the morning stars singing together and all the sons of God shouting for joy—compared with the ages of mingled sorrow and gladness that have come upon the world since.

When Adam and Eve had disobeyed the command of God, then God's treatment of those first children was at once adjusted to their conduct. As soon as the record passes from creation to government, every page and line and word of the Bible takes a character and color from human nature and from human action. God's purpose and procedure appear as patiently accommodated to our necessities.

It is hard to train men of sharp senses and strong appetites to believe the tru-

est word and to follow the best teaching; and so the things that were meant for life must sometimes turn to ministers of death—for man's warning and correction. Strange disturbances in nature and great struggles of men with each other cannot but be looked upon as signs and teachings. Evils that filled men's bodies with pain and their souls with fear were never thought to come without cause. Yet desirous as men have been to win the powers above them to their interest at any cost, they certainly have been apt to interpret things according to their own selfish wishes,—not ready of heart to believe in God's impartial goodness, or to be led by the men who were most clearly enlightened and strongly moved to act for Him. What have people been doing, that so many things have seemed to be against them? Why have they been afraid, in the hearing of voices full of wisdom and kindness? How bring them to a

right understanding in all things, and thus incline them to a generous confidence in the Father and a cheerful obedience to His will? The Bible is full of exemplary answers to such questions. It tells us what we have been doing in telling what God has been doing for us.

God touches us through nature and through His servants. It has been His way to take chosen men into some share of His counsels; and thus He has enabled them to publish His laws, to foreshadow His judgments, to write histories for a memorial of His goodness, and to celebrate His dealings in pious psalms. But all the Scriptures are what they are, because man is what he is. The dealings of God are set down as with immature beings always—and not seldom as with children that are perverse or rebellious. All good men of the Bible are worse treated in the world than they would have been had their

fellowmen been better ; while Jesus Christ, the greatest and best, was treated as of all men on earth the worst. All the way along we see the chosen servants of God trying to win men over to His truth and their duty, while men, on the contrary, show themselves as more or less obstinately pre-occupied, wayward, disobedient. Even the good are not always faithful to their charge. The best are trying to do better. Only our Lord Jesus fulfilled all righteousness, and really perfected the work that was given Him to do.

Jesus is the First-begotten of the Father, the Elect in whom His soul delighteth, the beloved Son in whom He is well pleased,—whom we are to hear and to obey. Jesus Christ is the Mediator—doing for man on behalf of God, and doing for God on behalf of man, all that the perfect law of love requires. He the Son of God shows us of the Father, as the creation shows us of the

Creator; and, the Son of man He is infinitely human,—human as Moses and the prophets were not in so far as they were not divine as is He. All previous teaching comes to its full meaning in His work. He shows just what it is for a man to be a child of God.

The wonderful effort of our Lord, consummated on earth in His crucifixion only to be carried on at the right hand of the Father in Heaven,—all this mysterious effort, I say, witnessed and recorded by His disciples, is left as His Testament to mankind in all the world and to all time :—to the intent that all men, the worst as well as the best, taught by the spirit of truth to know Him more and more, might trust and follow Him one by one as their Lord and Saviour. Thus the very secrets of the hearts are made manifest. Who is good now? Whoever is in active moral sympathy with our Lord Jesus. And is anybody already condemned? Only he whose

heart is alienated from the Son of God's love, and whose conduct is consequently opposed to His heavenly teaching.

Now it is plain enough where we are. Immature and earthly like others, we exist under the strong light of the Christian truth. If our first parents could not be saved from falling into sin but by obeying the word of God, no more can we be saved from falling into sin but by hearing the word of our Lord Jesus Christ. Not to do right is to do wrong. Tell me when and where it has been known that people have done right, except in obeying, as best they might, the voice of God. Was it before the flood, under Moses, the judges, the kings, the prophets? Was it a good account the Roman and Jewish world gave of itself in putting to death the Prince of life, or in persecuting His followers? In what were the eleven disciples, and the Marys, Nicodemus, and Joseph of Arimathea, with hundreds of the faithful whose names

we know not, better than those who denied the Lord before Pontius Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go? Yet the faithful were not perfect.

Adam and Eve, leaving undone the thing they ought to have done,—that is, not putting their confidence in the word of God,—proceeded to do the thing they ought not to have done, in the way of formal disobedience. Have we not all labored under the same difficulty:—too much confidence in ourselves, too little faith in God? We have been children of flesh and blood, of sense and appetite, of passion and prejudice, of curiosity and self-will; and this is why we have been so prone to hold cheap and barter away our birthright as children of spirit and truth, of faith and conscience, of patience and obedience,—that is, as children of God.

Instead of being born to new good by every word of God, it has been too much our way to go on behaving just like the

ignorant and sensual creatures we might have been if no new light had been given us. We have conducted ourselves in such a manner as to give our Heavenly Father endless trouble with us. We have made Him to serve with our sins, and wearied Him with our misdoings. We have compelled Him to visit us with His just and merciful corrections, little thinking that in all our afflictions He is afflicted ; and when our sufferings had moved His pity, and He gave us help from His holy place, we soon forgot that the angel of His presence saved us. Unfaithful to the commands that are least, how must we have conducted ourselves toward the truth that is greatest ? Have we not been wanton and selfish in enjoying the things we coveted,—servile and cowardly in trying to beg or buy off the chastisements we feared ?

Men have moved on together in families, tribes, and nations, taking more



pleasure in the familiar flock than in the noble leader ; so that it has been hard to discipline them in masses, as well as hard to raise individuals to singular virtue. The individual can always see his character mirrored more or less distinctly in the fashion of his time. Our doings make the history and experience that are our schoolmasters ; while our schoolmasters sternly push us on to new and better doings. Our great trouble is that we side with the evil of the past ; and this we do whenever we do not come to the Light for reproof and guidance.

Each of us must ask, what part have I taken in this human progress, wherein the Word of God is ever more a word of reproof and correction as well as of instruction in righteousness ? In what actions have I been reproved ? What have I done ? No time for excuses now—no need of pleading our own cause ; the need is of honestly learning

what we ought to do in distinction from what we have been doing. Our Teacher is also our Advocate. What care or love for ourselves have we to compare with His self-sacrifice on our account? What excuse of ours could avail like "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do?" But to know Jesus is to learn about our doings. Innocent or guilty, our sufficiency is of God—not in ourselves. Guilty or innocent, our future character cannot depend wholly upon the brief past of our existence. There is something for us to do—things being as they are.

*I will hear what God the Lord will speak: for He will speak peace unto His people and to His saints; but let them not turn again to folly.*

## IV.

WHAT SHALL THEREFORE THE LORD OF THE  
VINEYARD DO?—*Mark xiv. 9.*

**I**F what we do is of great interest as being the reason in part of that which God is doing to us, then what God does to us is of the utmost importance, not only as showing His judgment of us, but as enabling us also to have some knowledge of Him.

We may well ask: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" But what at any particular crisis it is right for the Judge of all the earth to do—only He can tell. Our rash thoughts and childish opinions are corrected by His practical teaching; and, in the course of His dealings with us we learn more and

more of His intention and of His character.

It is needful also that God should open to us a great range of vision. And, as we are very short-sighted, this must take a very long time. How God gives us our daily lessons we may learn day by day; but how He judges the progress of the learners after long years of discipline, only long years can teach. The sense of discomfort that comes after too heavy a meal is a significant lesson; but it is not by itself so fearfully instructive as is that judgment, which comes after many such lessons have passed unheeded, and which consigns the victim of vile disease to a dishonorable grave.

But how much larger is the range of vision given us in the history of nations. It is in history that God's righteousness is like the great mountains, and His judgments are a great deep. The infinite Father takes care of na-

tions, as He takes care of the individuals and families that compose them. They have their boundaries appointed by Him. All nations owe Him tribute. To all He raises up teachers of their own—able to lead on to something better than is generally known and done. All are concerned in His great purpose of bringing the First-begotten Son into the world. But of one nation as concerning the flesh the Christ must come; and this nation we see taken into training in a peculiar way. Theirs is a choice vineyard, and of them special tribute is required. They are led through wonderful trials, and are taught the judgments of the Lord in a history full of marked favors and full of pointed rebukes. To them the prophets come early and late to tell them of their high duty and their great hope. In the fulness of time the Child of promise appears,—their Prince and the Saviour of the world. If they, the husbandmen of

the choice vineyard, have abused God's servants, will they not at least reverence His Son? And if they conspire to kill the Heir,—what then? Refusing to receive Him who came to what was peculiarly His own, will they not be more blameworthy than the outer world that knew Him not?

It is a judgment of the world—when ruling men set themselves to judge our Lord! Is He not the King? Shall the race bring forth another? No! The vocation of bringing the promised Prince into the world was consummated when Jesus was born in Bethlehem. But the spiritual calling! Will the Jews see that? Will they come under the guidance and protection of their Prince? Will they be born to new life through the living Word, and advance in the van of the new host of the Lord to the heritage of the whole earth? Or, will they prefer to fill up the measure of their unbelieving fa-

thers; furnishing only a small contingent to the army of disciples, while as a people they become enemies and fall victims to the new faith? With what judgment they judge shall they not be judged?

What a critical trial it was! What a summing up of their case for the Jews as a nation! It was too much for the calmness even of Jesus, when, approaching Jerusalem, he beheld the city and wept over it; and St. Paul was well-nigh beside himself for his brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh:—their house left unto them desolate, their city soon to be destroyed, and the people dispersed to a long and painful wandering.

But pending the disclosure of this great judgment upon the unbelieving people, what did the Lord of the vineyard do in the way of mercy? Were the husbandmen judged and cast out of the vineyard indiscriminately—with no

regard to individual characters ? By no means ! Who were Peter and Paul and the other apostles ? Where was the proclamation of the gospel of repentance and forgiveness to begin, but in the doomed city where it was so much needed ? What, indeed, was our Lord's laying down His life but practical amnesty—the very extreme of forbearance, the infinite forgiveness, setting no limits to the penitent's hope ? The Saviour would not leave His betrayers and murderers to the consequences of their blindness, without appealing to them with the testimony of His resurrection and through the Spirit of Truth coming to the world in His name. The Jews stood before the risen Saviour with the whole Gentile world. Old differences were of no account. All needed mercy ; and there was mercy for all. The Jews were just as welcome to believe in Him whom they had denied as were the gentiles to believe in Him whom they had



not known. To all the word was, "Come, take up the Cross, and follow Me." Come, priests and scribes. Come, Pharisees and Sadducees. Come, all Jews with all Gentiles. The invitation was unlimited. Why should not the Jews come first? Theirs were the faithful fathers, theirs the prophets; to them were committed the oracles of God; of them Christ came. Why tarry in the desolate house, in the outer darkness, when so many were coming from the East and from the West, to sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of God? Is there not power in the Saviour's resurrection to make men welcome the fellowship of His sufferings? Are there not powers of the world to come strong enough to call men from the wreck of the world that is passing away? Since men must die, and they of Jerusalem must die terribly in the destruction of their city, what glory or blessedness for them like

being alive unto God in their spirits through the Spirit of the Father dwelling in them?

Such was the Christian calling addressed to all men, suited to all men, necessary for all men:—no other way of escape from old errors, no other way of entrance into the saving grace and holy discipline and ultimate peace of God's eternal kingdom. Did not the Judge do right?

But what a change, when the Lord of the vineyard superseded the old dispensation with the new! How little can we know or conceive the wonder it was, taking place to human view in open day and in common history, yet coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory! For more than eighteen hundred years the Lord of the vineyard has been doing the things that were to be done as the proper sequel of His cross and passion, His resurrection and ascension, and the coming of the Holy

Ghost. The story of it is the triumphal psalm of our Lord's mediatorial reign. It is the opening of the kingdom of heaven to all believers; and it is the assurance of the Saviour's coming to be the Judge. The Judge will take account of what we individually shall have been doing under the dispensation of grace. For the love and patience of our Lord are always pressing us to hear His voice to-day—after so long a time—and not to harden our hearts.

Think of the simple majesty of this triumphal psalm, and consider what our Lord is doing. Why did the heathen rage and the people imagine a vain thing? The King is enthroned. The heathen are His inheritance. He rules and judges the nations—rules them, if need be, with a rod of iron, or dashes them in pieces like a potter's vessel; that men may hear His voice, pay homage to His authority, accept His mercy, and enter one and all into His joy. His

proclamation of forgiveness and favor is all abroad. He is higher than the kings of the earth,—ruling in a plenitude of sweet and glorious characters. He is Brother, Friend, Advocate—yea, our better self; for we are incomplete and not properly ourselves apart from Him. He came to announce—and is He not still proclaiming the acceptable year of the Lord?

*Behold, now is the day of salvation.*

## V.

WHAT SHALL WE DO THEN?—*Luke iii. 10.*

**I**T is ours to do at any moment according to our knowledge of what God has done and is doing for us.

Would it be right for the awakening and expanding soul to turn freely to the light of God's truth and live by every word of His mouth? Then it would be right also for the erring or disobedient, finding the voice of God still near and urgent, to turn to the holy commandment for reproof and guidance. Right, then, and thrice blessed must it be for all to hear and obey the Lord Jesus, since our perfection is revealed in Him. He is our one example of heavenly conduct; and His example is good for the whole

range of human activity from the cradle onward.

Our range of activity is immense. We are not born to our households merely,—but to our country, world universe,—to all ages, all truth, all being ; because we are children of God, meant to be joint heirs with Jesus Christ to a heritage of endless duty and endless joy.

But our duty as well as our joy must reveal itself within us according to the measure of our growing capacity. We cannot be hurried headlong into our possessions and dignities. A man must be trained well and a good while, if he is to be fit for the intimate counsels of his president or prince ; how much more then, if the King of heaven and earth is to take him into confidence and give him honorable service. Hence it is that our Father, who is the great King, is careful of our very earliest training. When we come to the place where two ways meet,—one the way of

forbidden self-indulgence, the other the way of serious wisdom and just authority,—He takes care that these ways shall be known, one as conducting invariably to an experience of evil, the other as leading no less certainly to the enjoyment of comparative good ; and, that the two ways shall be marked, one with the sign “thou shalt not”, the other with the sign “thou shalt”.

If then our heavenly Father is so careful to secure our discipline as to “the two ways” ; if He will have us submit to the laws of nature and to the commandments of men for His sake, while as yet we are under tutors and governors—mere novices in life and not differing practically from servants ; how much more must He provide for the maturing of our characters as full-grown children. How simply necessary it appears to the carrying out of the Father’s good purpose,—that the first-begotten Son should visit his younger brethren

in person ; that He should justify the confidence of all who had honored Him in anticipation of His advent, and win the trust of all,—even of those, if possible, who might be for a time most brutally alien and unbelieving. And, if it is good conduct for us to yield a confident obedience to our tutors and governors, while as yet we are not able to know our great Teacher and our heavenly Father, much more must it be good conduct for us to put our whole trust and confidence in our Lord Jesus, when we learn how He has visited us in great humility. What good father would not look to have his children born again to him as heirs of his thoughts, feelings, purposes and efforts ? What reasonable child could be content to remain forever a mere servant or apprentice, dwarfed in all powers, and disappointed as to all advancement, heir only of “thou shalt not”, and “thou shalt” ? And, will the Heavenly Father allow



eternal minority to be the life of his children? Or, shall his children postpone their great inheritance out of fondness for first lessons and the rudiments of this world? Nay! What we are to do is to go on from faith to faith, as we are called ever forward by the revelations of truth and love.

We find, therefore, that there is one thing, which is always the same thing in kind, and which we are always to do, according to the light that is given us, both because the thing is right in itself, and because it leads to right doing in all possible particulars of action : we are to believe in the wisest and best Counsellor.

“This is the work of God,” said Jesus, “that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent.” “And this is life eternal,” said the great Teacher on another occasion, “that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.”

Now, if we believe in the Teacher, we shall set ourselves to learn of Him; and certainly to learn of Him is the way to increase our faith in the Teacher. So, believing that we may learn, and learning that we may believe, both our acquaintance with our Lord and our new faith in Him are all the time working together to give us a growing sense of living with Him. Doing all things under His direction, all our powers are informed and animated by His guidance. We ourselves are changed into His image. All our doings become pleasing to Him in so far as our purpose is to please Him; while, so far as our efforts are still awkward and imperfect, our good will and obedient exertion are the practical assurance that He will enable us to go from strength to strength. For He is always with us for our correction and encouragement.

It is He who has charged Himself with our training in the past. It is His

Spirit who is in all the world, leading sincere souls to the true knowledge of God and of themselves, stirring up the faithful to works of love such as were done by Him in person for an example to His followers. It is He, in short, who has been ruling over us and reigning in us—little as we have been able to appreciate His doings. And now, so far as our understanding can go, do we not find everything to encourage, as well as to require, our faith in Him?

Where shall we begin to find fault with God's ways? Shall we complain of the things that are made and the course of nature? Shall we criticise the history of our race, and talk of mankind as a turbulent and misgoverned family,—throwing the blame upon Him, who has always been most practically pointing out the right and correcting the wrong? Shall we denounce the conditions under which we as individuals have lived, or bewail the mistakes

and deficiencies of our education, and so turn away from the voice of Him, who was willing to bear us and all our burdens—for the joy of sharing with us all the treasures of His truth and love? God forbid !

On the contrary, shall we not trust in our Saviour, and be loyal to our King? What hope is ours, when we feel Him drawing us with cords of a man, with bands of love! We find love in the kingdom of nature, teaching us to win life by obeying law ; love in the civil governments of the world, wherein our relative rights are sought to be secured by the restraint and punishment of evil-doers ; love in the common social life, in which the nobler example and the better influence are constantly helpful to all but those who refuse the better part. Just as we grow up to know that we are citizens of a country, which we are to serve and honor, with whose best citizens and highest officers we shall

come into personal intimacy in proportion as our service is of public importance; so are we to advance in our apprehension of the kingdom of God. We are to know that the heavenly kingdom is all embracing; that it is first and best, that all good hopes and treasures are in it, and that no power can prevail against it; that it offers us honorable service, suited to every order of ability, and invites us, lowly as we are, to personal friendship and even intimacy with the King.

In learning that God's kingdom is for us as really as we are for it, and that God is ever doing for us in order that we may be doing ever more and better for Him, we cannot help coming to a personal intercourse and understanding with our Lord. It was to this that St. Francis of Assisi attained after overcoming many temptations. The story is told thus :

“Beating his breast, he sought after

Jesus, the Beloved of his soul, and having found Him at last in the secret of his heart, now he spoke reverently to Him as his Lord, now he made answer to Him as his Judge, now he besought Him as his Father, now he conversed with Him as his Friend."

Blessed society and conversation of the heavenly kingdom! The King communes with each as well as with all; and the meekness and gentleness of Christ toward the feeblest of His flock becomes the law of kindness ever dwelling on the lips of all His servants in their converse with one another. Before we have learned that we ought to seek first the kingdom of God, the kingdom of God has imparted to us an elementary instruction and training; while our love is lying dormant in the possibilities of an unschooled heart, the kingdom is causing us to do many services, and to overcome many temptations; till at length it appears that all was meant

to gain us a more effectual introduction to our Prince and Saviour. He refreshes our weariness, pardons our faults, encourages our diligence, lifts us above the level of servants to the communion of love, saying : “ *Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.*”

## VI.

WHAT SHALL WE THEN SAY TO THESE THINGS?

IF GOD BE FOR US, WHO CAN BE AGAINST US?

*Rom. viii. 31.*

LET us in a few words go over again the thoughts we have had in our minds :

First, we thought the great question for us to be the question of duty,—what our Father would have us to do ; and this meant that we could have no concern with our welfare as distinguished from our duty, since the very beginning of duty is in simple trust—that takes the Father's will as the best and only assurance of our welfare.

Secondly, it was seen that what we ought to do is made known in the things done for us ; in other words, that the



creation of God is addressed to us, and that as soon as we are born we are set to work with things which are set to work with us. We found that God is for us in sun, wind, rain and soil ; and that He is for us in the special care and instruction of our natural guardians and teachers.

Thirdly, we made some inquiry as to our doings. It was natural to ask whether we as a race of God's creatures or as individuals, had been as dutiful toward our Creator as He had been beneficent to us. We found our history to be clearly marked, and that the facts were favorable to us chiefly as affording testimony of God's persistent training of us to duty,—of His checking, reproofing, correcting and instructing us in the time of our ignorance and self-will. The difficulty of bringing us up to do right appeared in constant appeals to our second thought and better judgment through chosen messengers ; while our

intractableness was but too apparent in the treatment to which prophets and righteous men were often subjected, until the world uttered the saddest judgment upon itself, in the crucifixion of the Son of God.

Fourthly, came a question that implied a conceivable limit to our Father's patience, a possible change in our Lord's treatment of us :—such patient and practical love on God's part, to be met with such unbelief and violence on man's part ! What shall the Lord do, therefore ? Is it for Him to fail or to be discouraged ? Or, shall not rather the world's unworthiness of the Prince afford only the more convincing proof of how worthy the Prince is to be the Saviour of the world ? Verily He is able to save unto the uttermost ; and, lest any temporary ignorance or unschooled passion should defeat His merciful design, the Saviour, in the glory of His resurrection, and by the Spirit of truth,

appeals to the juster and tenderer thoughts of His human brethren. Not one who will receive the testimony of the Lord shall be held under the condemnation of an unbelieving world.

Fifthly, the great question came home to us again with accumulated meaning : What shall we do then ? The history of the world is made to repeat itself in the life of every individual. Starting without knowledge and without faith, each one of us is set to going over the whole Bible record of human experience of which each life is a part, so that we may learn what sort of world and what sort of history we have to do with. Thus the kingdom of God, having encompassed our path, even in our ignorance, is found to be within us through knowledge and faith,—pervading all our powers, and with our co-operation bringing us into harmony with all the divine mind and will.

Every inquiry into which the great

question led us, was found to be on the way to just one great answer:—Have faith in God ; put your whole trust and confidence in His mercy declared unto mankind in Christ Jesus our Lord. As easily could you create yourself out of nothing at first, as you could create yourself anew to the fullness of natural and spiritual manhood without God, and without the Christ who is our Lord.

Of the faith which our Lord found when He was upon earth, of how He organized that faith in the Christian church, and of what it was given the church to do, we shall have something to say hereafter.

Meanwhile, would that I could convey to my reader, by some happy hint, the true idea of faith ; that I could make him know how natural and how blessed faith is. Are not all things of God ? Is not that then a most beautiful disposition and action of a man wherein he receives all things as of God, and out of

all things gets God's word and suggestion for the guidance of all his own actions?

Are not all things of God through Jesus Christ, the living Word, whose Spirit dwells within us, as counsel and inspiration? To bow with reverence and obedience before the revelation of God in His Son, to yield ourselves as living temples for the indwelling of His Spirit,—what is this but to be led from utter ignorance into all truth, to grow up as children of God—joint heirs with Jesus Christ in the unity of the same Spirit? This is to live by faith.

All things call us and all things train us to faith. How are you so sure that the sun will continue to rise after his going down, and the seasons to return in due order? How are you so sure that, even in a human society immature and liable to error as is society in this world, righteousness shall in the long run be honored and injustice condemn-

ed? The assurance in either case is by faith. God has succeeded in building up a certain persuasion in our being, by simply abiding faithful Himself in the practical support of that persuasion.

How can we gain assurance that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God,—our proper Master and Lord? We gain this assurance by faith; by accepting first a perfectly trustworthy testimony, and then finding that our Lord abides practically and unchangeably faithful to the testimony,—showing us the best things, leading us in the best life. Or, if we refuse to believe, God abideth faithful. He cannot deny Himself or deceive us. He will undeceive us at last, however long we may deceive ourselves.

Why is it, that, having known and listened to our Lord, we begin to have better thoughts of God,—that we no longer accuse Him in our hearts as a hard Master, but revere Him as the all-

wise, the most gracious Father? Evidently the change comes by our faith in Jesus, when He points out the true meaning and intention of the Father's dealings with us. With our Lord we are taken into the method of sacrifice, through which the glories and joys of the eternal life are wrought out. Suddenly dark things are lighted up. Momentary afflictions are not to be weighed against the exceeding and eternal weight of glory. It behooved the Christ to suffer, and to enter into His glory. It is good for the servant to suffer, and be glorified with his Lord. Are we reconciled to God by the death of His Son? Much more then, being reconciled, shall we be saved—that is, led on in the way of our perfection and welfare—by Him, who, having once died for us, is now alive forever more?

What can be right for us, if faith be not right? We cannot live without faith. We are obliged to have confi-

dence in the course of nature, which is confidence after a blind sort in the God of nature. We are under the necessity of having faith in ordinary men as being in some sense God's servants. What commanding reason, what unmistakable rightness in that faith which embraces in our Lord Jesus Christ both the revelation of God and the consummation of man !

Finally, though there be those in the world who have no name for Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, still must they live by faith, listening to the voice within that tells them of the better things ; and so, ever doing the higher will uttered in the law of their spirits, they must await the appearing of their Lord, both theirs and ours. For, little as they may be able to suspect it, He is *the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.*



## VII.

NEVERTHELESS WHEN THE SON OF MAN COMETH,  
SHALL HE FIND FAITH ON THE EARTH? *Luke*  
*xviii. 8.*

WHO is this Son of man?  
The Son of man is He to  
whom all the prophets give witness, in  
order that all men may give Him faith.

As the Revelation of God He is entitled to faith; and He seeks faith that He may be the Saviour of men. He had to come once as a candidate for their confidence, that men might know and follow Him as their rightful Lord.

It is for every one of us to follow the Saviour by faith; and so it is fitting that we salute Him at His coming. Let us try to enter into sympathy with His experience on earth:

First, as to His need of finding faith:

Secondly, as to the kind of faith He needed to find:

Thirdly, as to His way of seeking faith by making Himself known to disciples.

Could so wonderful a being as our Lord Jesus feel the need of anything? He is wonderful in the very need which it was for Him to feel. If a man comes with a high claim and a great calling, and other men do not believe in him, they have no alternative but to look upon him as a great criminal. Not to find faith is to find condemnation and punishment.

All princes have to guard themselves against the unbelief of their people. They are lifted up by law, enriched with revenues, counselled by learning, fortified by civil authorities and military forces. In this way they have been able often to wield power even after they have forfeited faith. But this is not the

way of the divine Prince. He cannot sway the souls of men as He desires to sway them without their free consent to His ruling. Faith, therefore, He seeks as the condition of all His success. He would rather die for want of outward defences, if so He might win faith, than live surrounded by all outward signs of devotion, yet without being freely accepted as the Sovereign of men's hearts.

Think, too, what kind of faith the Son of man needed. Ordinary faith would not do. Faith that might make the fortune of a Simon Magus,—of what account would it be with Jesus? The Saviour cannot do His work with a blindly credulous and selfish following. Faith of the poor widow's type, who undertook to worry the judge into attending to her case, though he feared not God nor regarded man, was good enough for such a judge; but a better faith must be given to Him, who is not unjust, and who is perfect Love. The man

who would rise at midnight and give his friend three loaves simply because he could not bear to be importuned, would no doubt find exactly such faith as his conduct would deserve. But Jesus wanted faith, whose ceaseless importunity would take form in His own prayer to the Father in Heaven,—faith that would find delight with Him in doing the Father's will on earth.

The best believers in the world were called to new faith when the Lord came. Only a little while before Simeon might have said with Israel of old,—“ I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord ;” but when the infant Saviour was in his arms the earlier faith was out of date, and he exclaimed,—“ Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word ; for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation.” The voice of prophetic anticipation that John the Baptist lifted up in the desert was changed to the voice of loyal recognition at the baptism

of Jesus. And yet again from the prison John sent to Jesus—the voice not of a prophet but of an eager and anxious disciple.

What then was our Lord's way of seeking the faith that should be suited to His character and aim?

There was not an instant's uncertainty. He had not come too early nor too late. The way of the Lord was prepared. True, the world was set in order for His advent; but He came to His own people. His own received Him not; so He came to the disciples of John the Baptist. Many of John's disciples were content to be John's disciples still; therefore Jesus watched for those who were watching for Him. Faith sprang up to greet Him as naturally as the blade of wheat starts up to salute the sun. We have a lively account of the faith He found as it appeared in its morning freshness.

“Behold the Lamb of God,” said John

to two of his disciples, looking upon Jesus as He was walking. Any faith to greet the Saviour so early? "The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus." Did Jesus see their faith? "Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, "What seek ye?" Did they have faith enough to ask for further acquaintance? "Master, where dwellest Thou?" they said. How did Jesus greet their confidence? "Come, and see," said He. Did the hospitable invitation find acceptance? Yes; faith still moved them. They came and saw, and abode with Him that day. And shall not their faith abide with Him forever? At any rate there was a promptness in asking others to share their faith. Andrew finds his own brother Simon, and brings him to the Messiah. Jesus invites Philip to be of the number of His followers. Philip finds Nathaniel. The number of disciples is increased, while the conviction

they have of their Lord's character grows with everything He does. Faith makes them disciples. Discipleship is to increase and try their faith.

The trial and progress of faith is ever in our Lord's thoughts. Knowing what was before His disciples in the world, and that He must train some for high places and great service in His kingdom, He is at much pains to warn and teach in such a way that no one could enlist under His banner without counting the cost.

It was a marked day in our Lord's ministry, when, after He had continued all night in prayer to God, He chose twelve from among His disciples, whom also He named apostles. These made up the immediate family and school of the great Teacher. His setting forth of their calling was the truth itself. There was not one flattering tint in the picture. Theirs indeed was the kingdom of heaven; but the kingdom could

not come without offences and persecutions. When some fell away from following Jesus and He turned to the trusty few with—"will ye also go away?" Simon Peter could answer, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." But how much had Peter and the rest yet to learn before they would be ready to lay down their lives for His sake.

It was not easy to make the disciples understand what their Master had to teach. They knew not what He did. They were puzzled with things He said. He was often compelled to be dark and disappointing to them, that He might lay up within them by word and deed that treasure of divine revelation, which the Spirit of truth would afterward teach them to remember and proclaim.

Yet how simple and practical was the great Teacher: not shutting Himself up to the few, but making the few His helpers in teaching the many. By giving



His disciples a part in His public ministry He made His public ministry react with peculiar force upon the disciples. Did He find parables best suited to the people in general? "It is given unto you," he said to the more eager inquirers, "to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven." Seeing the multitudes He went up into a mountain; and of course it was the disciples who gathered around Him after He was seated, that they might listen for the whole world to the sermon on the mount. So, through all the teaching and preaching in the synagogues, the disputings in the temple, the talks in houses and by the way, it was the disciples especially who were to hear and understand.

The miracles,—were they not wonders of practical teaching no less than wonders of power and goodness? The power and goodness availed for others; the teaching was particularly for the disciples. Others enjoyed the wine at the

wedding feast of Cana ; but the Lord's disciples believed on Him. The thousands were satisfied with the loaves and fishes ; the twelve had their spirits stirred with the lesson of their Lord's bounty. Other men having seen the miracle would take Jesus by force to make Him a king ; the disciples allowed Him freely to teach them what a King He was. Mark the quick interest of the disciples, when their Master's help is sought. If after trying the petitioner's faith He broke forth into grateful applause, as if the faith He found was more precious to Him than the sense of His own power, who would pray, " Lord, increase our faith," if not the disciples ? Would the miraculous draught of fishes or the stilling of the tempest ever cease to rally the faith of the fishers of men ? " I am glad for your sakes that I was not there," said Jesus, referring to the death of Lazarus, " to the intent ye may believe." And,

for whose sake came the voice, when some said that it thundered, others that an angel spake unto Him ?

It is wonderful how the Lord turns everything to the best account for His disciples. No such divine watchfulness was ever known on earth before. We see Him keeping and saving those who had put themselves under His direction. He guards them against being unduly uplifted or unduly cast down ; and if His considerate goodness cannot always hold them back from rash ventures, He is ever ready to restore their souls after failures that were not to be prevented. "Why could not we cast him out ?" they ask ; and again, "Lord, wilt Thou that we command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, even as Elias did ?" In either instance the divine word is ready :—the Son of man is on earth not to destroy men's lives, but to save them ; and salvation is a work of sober self-discipline, not of incon-

siderate self-assertion. There is a kind that goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.

All of the twelve but one the Lord kept unto the end ; yet even the faithful eleven could not follow Him in the final trial till after He had shown them the way. The last passover, the holy supper, the heavenly discourse, His prayer as High Priest—all required the cross and passion, the resurrection and ascension, and the coming of the Holy Ghost, in order to become real to the disciples. Jesus could not give Himself by word only. He must do and suffer to reveal Himself. Not without exasperating the world's unbelief could He win the faith of His followers. Not without the death which unbelief would inflict could Jesus reveal the immortal life He desired to impart. He must fulfil His revelation, if He would perfect forever the believer's faith. He did fulfill His revelation. His body was given, and

His blood was shed—for whom? “For you,” “for you,” was His repeated saying to the disciples; and so it was the more effectually for many, for all. Once having endured the cross, and showing Himself alive after His passion, He became the perfect example of victory through sacrifice—Leader in faith from the first springing of the blade to the full corn in the ear.

Taught by His dying and His rising again, the disciples knew how they were to bear their testimony to His truth; and the Comforter could comfort them under all tribulations.

Verily the Son of man found faith, and by His divine teaching of His disciples He so filled out their faith that it became the faith. Having continued with Him in His temptations, seen His glory, kept His words, suffered in His death, revived in His resurrection, the apostles were ready at length, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to fulfill

the great commission with which their Lord at once honored their faith in Him and testified His confidence in them :—

*“ Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”*

## VIII.

THEN THEY THAT GLADLY RECEIVED HIS WORD  
WERE BAPTIZED.—*Acts ii. 41.*

**A**S our Lord found faith on the earth by making Himself known to His disciples, so His disciples were to find faith by making their Master known to all nations and to every person. "As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you," was His word; and then He breathed on them, and said unto them, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost."

The apostles were to do the work of Him that sent them in His way:—His word was their message, His ministry their example, His Spirit their helper, and their aim His glory and joy in the world's redemption.

To be disciples of our Lord Jesus is not a duty to be compared with other duties ; it is the duty that sums up all duties and secures their fulfilment. We are to do all things in the name of the Lord Jesus, and without Him nothing is well done that is done. Many as the things may be in detail which we have to do, they are all one—all included in following Christ. To serve Him is the privilege and glory of all service. To be His disciples is to learn why we were made, and is to be made anew unto good works. To believe in Him is to know that His Father is our Father, and so to be begotten and born again as children of God. The gift of Jesus Christ to be our Saviour is to save all other gifts from losing their flavor. Therefore we say : “ Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift.” To proclaim the truth as the truth is in Jesus is to preach glad tidings. The glad tidings are to be heard gladly, and those that



gladly receive the word are to do what the word prescribes: they are to be baptized.

Here two questions meet us:

What does Baptism stand for in Christian teaching?

What is the practical use of Baptism in the economy of Christian discipleship?

It is not the ritual of Baptism with which we are concerned now. Every disciple will receive the rite according to the usage of that body of Christians in which he becomes a member. It is the history of Baptism that tells us its meaning and use; and happily for us this history is very simple and full of life. In it, Baptism has one radical significance, which no incidental variation can obscure. We may state it thus:

Baptism stands for the outward administration of the divine word as related to the inward working of the Divine Spirit in faithful disciples.

See that majestic man in raiment of camel's hair, who has retired to the desert, and yet is sought after by multitudes from Jerusalem, from all parts of Judea, and from beyond the Jordan. The people invade his solitude, and throng about him as if the world had grown flat, stale and unprofitable; and he is telling them of a better world to come. The very kingdom of heaven, he assures them, is at hand. But the kingdom of heaven is for heavenly people—the best world for souls that are suited to it. They must all get ready for it.

Many were very much in earnest. They confessed their sins, and asked what they should do. John, speaking for the Law and the Prophets, told them what to do. He gave such directions for their conduct as would put them in practical training for the new life to come. He charged his disciples to do works suited to their new convictions; and especially he called upon them to

give a sign and pledge of their discipleship. Is it good for you that my doctrine should drop as the rain and distil as the dew? Will you be drenched with the truth—bathed in the purifying element? Then declare it here in the Jordan. Receive the baptism of water as a pledge that you will receive obediently that for which the baptism stands, namely, the administration of God's word through which His Spirit influences the dispositions and reforms the conduct of the faithful.

Of course this meaning of the baptismal rite proves itself true only by furnishing a full and consistent sense to those passages in the New Testament that refer to baptism. In other words, we must find that the word "baptism" actually does stand for the meaning stated. For example, when it is said that many of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees came to John's baptism, it does not of necessity mean that they

received baptism as John's disciples; but rather that they came to that outward administration of God's word for which baptism stands; they were curious to hear John's preaching and to watch the effect of his ministry. Hence the stern rebuke and exhortation he addressed to them. When Jesus said: "The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven or of men?" not the bare rite is referred to, but that for which the rite stands—the administration of the divine word that ought to have made the Scribes and Pharisees believe in John, and that did make the people count him for a prophet. When our Lord says to Nicodemus: "Except a man be born of water and of the spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God," he does not mean that the formal rite of baptism by water alone is so indispensable. His meaning takes in both the rite and what the rite stands for. The outward administration of God's word through

which the spirit works is that without which we cannot be born into the spiritual family and kingdom of God. So in the first Epistle of St. Peter Christians are described as "born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God which liveth and abideth forever." "Of His own will begat He us by the word of truth," declares St. James; and St. Paul connects the rite of baptism with what the rite stands for, when he teaches the Ephesians that Christ "loved the church, and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word." Also, when St. Paul writes: "For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel;" what does it mean but simply that he was not sent to administer a mere form of baptism, but the word of truth for which the form stands, and by which baptism and all other rites get their proper meaning and use?

Though we cannot now refer to all places in the New Testament which would set baptism before us in its proper sense, there is one example of it which we must by no means fail to study. Jesus received baptism at the hands of John. Why? Because it was right that He should own and honor in baptism the administration of God's word for which baptism stands. Had He not grown to manhood under the Law and the Prophets? And He came not to deny, not to destroy the previous administration of divine truth, but to acknowledge and fulfil it. Could He be the whole revelation of God from everlasting and world without end, if His ministration of truth did not obediently recognize, as well as perfectly fill out the teaching already given? But mark the variation! Baptism stood to Jesus as to others for the administration of the divine word; but the word that called others to repentance could only justify

Him, and the Spirit who reproved others bore witness to Him from the Father: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." He, the obedient child of the Law, was greater than all ordinary conceptions of the Law. He was the man of prophecy, coming to be ministered unto only that He might minister and give His life a ransom for many. Baptism was lifted in His person to the perfect standard of divine truth. The act did not announce Jesus as one of a multitude of imperfect disciples. On the contrary, it gave the world assurance of all fulness in Christ—one body and one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all—above all, and through all, and in all. Moreover, our Lord's baptism, standing for the administration of divine truth, spiritually received and perfectly obeyed by Him, would stand also in His mind for all the suffering that perfect loyalty to the truth would bring. Hence we are able

to catch a glimpse of His great meaning, when He said : " I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished ; " or, when He asked the sons of Zebedee, " Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with ? "

It was not strange that Jesus by-and-by made and baptized more disciples than John ; for baptism administered by the disciples of Jesus in His name, standing for the administration of the divine truth in its completeness, would of course supersede the baptism that stood for an administration of truth prophetic and preparatory. Our Lord is the truth, not partial and of a day, but as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be. In our Lord's kingdom the baptism of water stands for the final and perfect administration of God's Word through the Spirit of truth. The Word and Spirit are reproving and re-



forming still, but in a perfect way ; not for the sake of some temporary improvement in human conditions or formal amendment of people's conduct, but for the sake of creating men anew, for the sake of their eternal loyalty and blessedness in union with their Lord and Saviour. Reproof is for the sake of reconciliation. The fulness of truth is the fulness of grace. Law and Love are one. In Christian baptism the question is not, "Will you be better behaved and more comfortable?" You could address yourself to an effort of personal improvement, with some success in a way, without the revelation of the Son of God. It is the kingdom of heaven which the Son of God opens to all believers. Will you have the good that God has for you? The universe cannot offer you more. Eternal goodness will not allow you to be content with less. Will you be taught of God? —take sonship, discipleship, citizenship,

service, advancement, eternal life and inheritance in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost? This is the question of holy baptism. The calling is one of infinite Love. "Come" is the herald's word. Whosoever will—let him come and take of the water of life freely. What doth hinder you to be baptized? Was the rite performed in your infancy on the faith of your sponsors that you would, on being duly instructed, accept the act for your own? And have you gladly received the word? Then you have accepted your baptism in accepting what it stands for. You have a threefold witness of your communion with Christ's church—the Water, the Word, and the Spirit of holiness. You were not brought to the baptism of water in your childhood, and yet you gladly receive the word? See here is water: you can be baptized.

But of what practical use is this baptism of water, some immature disciple

may ask, if not having received it, I am already receiving gladly what it stands for?

No doubt the ordinance of baptism given by our Lord to His disciples, has not only a great spiritual meaning, but a great practical purpose also. And as in the economy of discipleship the practical use of baptism depends upon its meaning, so too the meaning of baptism is much strengthened by its practical use.

Our Master does not call us to an existence of vague and general thinking. He carefully guards us against an unpractical habit of mind. We are all more or less accustomed to look at things theoretically. In a certain mood of mind one might possibly make light of the little seal upon a deed, might call it a trivial device—insisting that a man's word should be as good as his bond. But come into the practical sense of the thing: let the deed be yours—the

seal the legal attestation of your free act, on which the duties and rights of others as well as your own are depending,—and you cannot think lightly of the seal then. The seal makes your act a recognized law of conduct to yourself and others; and you cannot go back from what the seal stands for, because you are held to it by a public constraint and discipline which is the government of the state. Just so, if you have taken baptism as the appointed way of declaring in brief your free acceptance of what baptism stands for, you have made discipleship the permanent law of your conduct. Not only your King and Father with all your brethren in the faith, but the world itself will demand of you fidelity. You have in Christ's gospel the charter of your membership in His family and school. In baptism you set your signature and seal to the charter. By that act you come into a recognized relation as a child of God and joint heir

with Jesus Christ; while without that birth of water and of the Spirit, your relation at best is that of a hopeful candidate for the gracious adoption. The Christian family is spiritual and free. They choose and love the word of God. How, then, can God bear witness to your filial relation by sending the Spirit of adoption into your heart, while as yet you shrink back from signing the charter—the covenant of adoption, as if you were afraid the duty required might be too trying to allow of your accepting the privilege offered? Or, is it that you feel obliged to seek proof that God has actually created you anew, as a condition of your coming into voluntary co-operation with Him? Baptism is to guard you against such a mistake. You are asked to come into voluntary co-operation with God, that He may create you anew. If Jesus shows what the Father from eternity chooses that you should be, only by choosing to be like

Jesus will you find yourself in the number of His elect. Therefore take your baptism as the attestation of your confirmed choice. Adhere faithfully to its intention, if it was administered in your minority; or desire it ardently, like the honest Ethiopian who was as prompt to accept the gift of God as he was faithful in the charge of his queen's treasures, if you have not yet set to your seal that God is true. For be assured that however much you may have profited under the administration of God's word, and we know that His revealed truth becomes a common blessing in many ways, you are not in the perfect way, you have not frankly complied with the prescribed method of entering into the kingdom of God as a free citizen, you are not in open covenant to receive the complete renewing of the Holy Ghost,—till you have received the washing of regeneration.

Baptism is a sacrament; and "sacra-

ment" under the Roman empire meant the military oath. The tribune of soldiers, or colonel as we say, got his regiment together after their enlistment and picked out one of the men to whom he put the oath—"that he would obey the commands of his generals and execute them punctually." The other men then came forward one after another, and took the oath in a short form, saying—"the same in me"—"the same in me." It was the very starting point of military organization, discipline and service. Knowing the Captain of the sacramental host, knowing on what promises the church is founded, what warfare the church wages, and that an eternal triumph is assured to every true soldier of the Cross, can you give your consent to the whole in the short form of baptism, saying—"the same in me"? Will you be not only a child of God, but a soldier of Christ to fight manfully under His banner? Then shall you be indeed

of His kingdom. Your baptism shall not be a superstition; but shall candidly promise the perfecting of that which concerneth you, as it shall stand for your eternal allegiance to God's truth. In this way baptism takes its proper relation as an act so free and final, that it is always active, always in full force and virtue, always holding the disciple to one line of duty and one hope of his calling,—always attesting the permanent law of obligation, under which the disciple is led into all truth and duty.

Baptism is by no means an act with which, having once done it, we have nothing more to do. And certainly our baptism will have something to do with us, even though we should deny the faith and duty it demands. This sacrament is a swift witness against disloyalty or negligence.

If Jesus had been like other men—fond of his home and tolerably content with his father's trade,—we can conceive



that he would not have given his signature to God's truth and his duty in the baptism of John ; or, that he might have shown himself unequal to his high calling notwithstanding the sacramental acceptance of it. But Jesus is distinguished from other men. He is the perfect man. His life exhibits every phase of moral excellence we can aspire to. And so, having entered upon His ministry, being led by the Spirit into a great struggle, it is not for Him to fail or to be discouraged. No soldier can follow where the Leader has not gone ; but seeing the banner of the Cross, we learn what the baptismal sacrament involves. "Why cannot I follow Thee now?" said Simon Peter before the crucifixion. Enough if in the extreme trial we can follow Him afterward !

But are there any who find themselves persistently indisposed either to live or to die for their Lord's sake ? Bap-

tism is no sign for them. The sign of the Cross is not for them. Much as they may long for some charm against the dread of death or the dread of something after death, it is not in their power to conciliate the last enemy. So their fear holds out. Their case is that of Shakespeare's wicked cardinal:

“ Lord cardinal, if thou think'st on heaven's bliss,  
Hold up thy hand, make signal of thy hope.  
He dies and makes no sign.”

Under the Gospel there is no sign of hope to those who have no faith; and faith having made its own sign in baptism will never lose that badge. Faith abiding and growing in all Christian effort and experience will be the foretaste of heaven's bliss—*the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*

## IX.

THIS DO IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME.—*Luke xxii. 19.*

THE revelation of Jesus Christ in the flesh as our Teacher and Redeemer is for once ; but the dispensation of the truth through the Spirit, of whom our Lord says, "He shall receive of mine and shall show it unto you," is forever. So baptism, the rite in which we signify and seal our engagement to be Christ's disciples, is for once ; but discipleship, the life of spiritual docility and duty which baptism contemplates, is forever. It is eternal life to know God through Jesus Christ whom He hath sent. Certainly baptism, of all decisive acts to which we can ever be called, is incomparably the most important in what it

professes and promises. It is our introduction to the right manner of living,—to a frequent recurrence of divine thoughts leading on to a confirmed habit of gracious conduct.

The keeping in mind of thoughts that came to mankind with our Lord, and were the spirit and life of His teaching, depends very much upon the remembrance and attention of the disciple. Once brought into the fellowship of Christ's followers, we are ever afterward to know one Master of life; and, as our Master very soon went away from the bodily manifestation in which He made Himself known to us, we have one thing to do, and this we do again and again, by way of remembrance: we partake in common of bread and wine after the example of our Lord and His disciples at the last supper. This celebration is called the Eucharist, because it includes the giving of thanks; and, it is a sacrament also, because being in

remembrance of our Lord, it calls up and repeats the profession of faith and pledge of fidelity made in baptism—attesting as by a new “military oath,” our enrollment as soldiers of the Cross.

It is plain, therefore, that baptism and the Lord's Supper are vitally related. Both are for the same persons ; and, the first is received once in order that the other may be taken again and again, precisely as a person is once born in order that he may continually take the nourishment and exercise of life. It must be a living being that is born, or there is no natural birth ; and, there must be a living believer that is baptized, or there is no proof of spiritual birth. As the Psalmist says, “In thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them ;” so the Christian may say,—in thy book of the new creation all my spiritual powers were written, which in continu-

ance were spiritually fashioned, when as yet there was none of them—none, that is, to the poor view of mortals. St. Paul sets forth the origin and nurture of the Christian life by the example of Hebrew history, when Israel was born anew in the fact of being brought as the son of God out of Egypt. The people “were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea ; and did all eat the same spiritual meat ; and did all drink the same spiritual drink : (for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them : and that Rock was Christ)”. Their baptism being the announcement of new birth declared equally their entrance upon new life ; and, of course, upon the nourishment and exertion proper to that life. The inspiration of St. Peter flows in the same natural and well worn channel of speech. Addressing Christians as born again by the word of God, he goes on to exhort them :—“ as new born babes, desire the sincere milk

of the word, that ye may grow thereby; if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious: to whom coming as to a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God, by Jesus Christ." That "spiritual Rock," according to St. Paul, following the children of Israel to give them spiritual food and drink, whom they knew only in what He was doing for them, becomes, in the similarly bold figure of St. Peter, the chief corner stone elect, precious, laid in Zion according to the Scriptures as the foundation of the universal church; namely, Christ the Redeemer and Regenerator not of Israel merely but of the world. To know and to love Him is to be born anew as Israel of old could not be. For, the Rock of their salvation was following them in their ignorance instead of their following Him in His revelation.

Christ nourished and guided His Israel of old, that in the last times He might reveal the best things to all His people. For all He became incarnate, for all He gave His flesh and blood ; that He might become more to them than the manna of the wilderness, better than the water from the smitten rock, even the bread that came down from heaven—the true bread of the Father and the wine of eternal life. And if in obeying the voice of God spoken by His servants the children of Israel were to be a peculiar treasure unto Him above all people—a kingdom of priests and an holy nation,—certainly those who obey the voice of God in Christ His Son may well be hailed by St. Peter as “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people.” They are all children of God by faith in Jesus Christ. They all eat of the same spiritual meat, and drink of the same spiritual drink, according to our Lord’s own words :



“As the living Father hath sent me and I live by the Father ; so, he that eateth me, even he shall live by me.”

Let us notice here how faithfully our Master guards us against being stupidly literal in the meaning we attach to the figures wherein He illustrates our spiritual nourishment by the common eating of material food. How did Jesus live by the Father? By being one with Him in spirit—by communion of thought and purpose, by attention and obedience, doing the required act at the proper hour, in a word by love. How then shall we live by Jesus? Even so as He by the Father:—in communion of thought and purpose, by attention and obedience—all the effort proper to faith working by love. Only, while we are here in the flesh our fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ is through our knowledge of Jesus and our belief in Jesus as having come in our nature—in our flesh and blood. Through this reve-

lation in the body is made known the purpose of mercy, the love stronger than death. Jesus Christ in the body is that Revelation of a day which utters the truth of eternity; and so the incarnation is the nourishment of life eternal, the ground of eternal remembrance, recollection, knowledge, faith, hope, love. Feeding on Christ by faith, we live His life in the flesh. Having bodies prepared for us we learn to govern and use them as the instruments of our souls; even as Jesus took the body prepared for Him, delighting to do the will of the Father in it and with it. Without the body of our Lord—we do not perceive Him; we have no word from His lips, no healing from His touch, no dying and no rising again to show what immortality is. But having God with us, God manifest in the flesh, we have all that the prophets have spoken, and all that the apostles have testified,—even, as St. John declares, “that which

was from the beginning, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and our own hands have handled of the word of life." What the Apostles saw and testified we learn and remember. And thus through the body, in which our Lord was born and in which He suffered once for all, that He might rise superior to death, the eternal Spirit is able to teach us of Jesus Christ—the same yesterday and to-day and forever. The bodily manifestation is forever alive with what it brings to our knowledge, and nourishing to our spirits by reason of what it enables us to believe. Therefore, what our Lord asks us to do in remembrance of what He was when once He ate with His disciples in the body, and of how He gave His body to be broken and His blood to be poured out that His disciples might eat bread and drink wine with Him in His eternal kingdom—that it is very important that we should do. It belongs to our disci-

pleship. It concerns our communion with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ in the unity of the same Spirit. It is the commemoration of all things which have been written unto us that our joy may be full; as it is the type of all we are to do that our love and duty may be full also. Our feast of remembrance calls forth our psalm of praise and hope. Our anthem is that of all holy worshipers ;—“ *Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we laud and magnify thy glorious name; evermore praising Thee and saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts, heaven and earth are full of thy glory; Glory be to Thee, O Lord most High. Amen.*”

## X.

BELOVED, THINK IT NOT STRANGE, CONCERNING  
THE FIERY TRIAL WHICH IS TO TRY YOU.—  
1 *Peter iv.* 12.

OUR Lord made Himself known to men, that men might become like Him. Beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, they were to be changed into the same image,—not all at once, but from glory to glory.

In the holy Supper the Lord's death is shown as the crowning act of His earthly life. Till the disciple has crowned his earthly life with a dying in the spiritual likeness of his Lord's dying, he cannot dispense with this memorial. If we remember that our Master has shown us the way of life from first to last, we shall not expect to enjoy the dewy morning

without coming to the burden and heat of the day,—and just as little shall we look for the trials of life to cease till we have passed through the final trial of death.

If a man cannot all at once be made complete in the likeness of his Lord, neither can all men become the Lord's disciples at the same moment. Jesus made disciples in person just as He could gain access to men and bring His teachings to bear upon their lives. He makes disciples through the church now in the same manner. There is no ceasing of the spiritual endeavor to call out from the mass of mankind those who at any moment are bent upon learning of the great Teacher. The setting apart of disciples in general is on the way to the choice of particular disciples to particular services,—the twelve, the seventy, and so onward, whatever ministry believers may require. Christ the Head, Christians the body, ministers the organs, of one grow-

ing church—to be at last the sum total of those created anew unto good works:—such is the conception of our Saviour's kingdom.

The selection of disciples is spiritual certainly, in as much as it is the result of spiritual efforts and spiritual motives; but it is not on this account unnatural. Indeed it is in strict accordance with the nature of things.

Trial is the law of life here below. We are on trial as to whether or not we will learn the lessons of faith and duty given us before we know our Lord; and having been taught something of the truth, as the truth is in Jesus, we are still on trial as to how we will acquit ourselves as His disciples and servants. Whatever reality is presented to us, and in whatever way any teaching is brought to bear upon us, it is simply part of our common schooling. Will we pay such attention as to understand what concerns us and be convinced of its importance? And then,

will we have the decision and diligence to do as we have learned we ought to do? This law of trial apparent in the lowest stages and in the humblest concerns of our existence mounts up to an unspeakable grandeur in the progress of human experience. But from its lowest form to the highest our trial is not strange to us. Our trial is always familiar, natural—the simple fact that, such as we are and conditioned as we are, we are set to work our way according to the light that is given us,—be it the light that God sheds upon us in the common day, or the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Not only is our trial in general not strange, but it is by reason of our trial that we cease to be strangers to both ourselves and others. To be untried is to be unknown. Nothing is proved as to what one will do and be but by one's being and doing. Who will be Jesus' disciples? Who will be disciples of John?



Who will say,—“we are Moses’ disciples?” It will appear by trial. When the Master opens His school, it will be known who are His scholars. What disciples will be worthy of the Master? This too will be known by trial. Metals are tried in the fire. The trial of spirits is a fiery trial also. What does not belong to a pure and godlike manhood is driven away as dross from the smelted gold. Is Judas dross? Then away he runs to his own place from the fiery trial. Was Peter gold? The fiery trial drove away that dross of self-confidence, which was the weakness of his character, and left him stronger in the true faith that he might strengthen his brethren. In fine, since Jesus was the well-beloved Son, doing all the bidding of the Father, the fiery trial,—needed indeed to prove what manner of man He really was, could only serve to glorify Him with the Father. Therefore Jesus did not treat the fiery trial as if some strange thing were hap-

pening to Him. The fiery trial was eternally familiar to Him. It was the burden of prophetic anticipation. It was foreshadowed in all prophetic experience. He had not failed to count the cost of his enterprise. It was the fire of His love that really consumed the sacrifice. The passion of His charity led Him to endure the cross despising the shame; and so the cross—the instrument of His final pains in the flesh—became the sign of all pains endured or to be endured in overcoming evil with good. The cross, from which the Son of God rose out of the fiery trial to His heavenly reign, was found to contain the secret of all holy sacrifice, and to be the sign of all spiritual conquest. The cross stands for all that purifying and testing experience in which Christians are brought to know, in whatever degree, the fellowship of Christ's sufferings.

Wisely does St. Peter strengthen his brethren, when, looking forward in expect-

tation of being called at length to follow his Lord in the very trial to which he was not equal when the Lord endured it for him, he tries to lead them also to look upon their trial as nothing strange ;—and exhorts them even to rejoice inasmuch as they are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that, when His glory shall be revealed, they may be glad also with exceeding joy.

To be identified with Christ,—this is that for which the disciple is trying, and for which he is tried. It is enough for the disciple to be as his Master. Nothing else is enough. But this sufficiency is not arrived at by any disregard of the natural measure of power and experience either in the Master or the disciple. Jesus grew in a wise familiarity with his trial, and so was prepared to endure its most fiery intensity. It took about thirty years of quiet, dutiful learning to get Him ready for His baptism. Then, in the wilderness He went through that

mysterious temptation, in which was rehearsed, so to speak, all the trial of His public ministry. And, finally, His public ministry led Him into the sober, arduous, sublime experience, in which He learned as a man cannot learn apart from experience, what was in men, what was in the world, what were the powers and evils to be overcome, what was the cost at which the triumph must be gained. By this path He came to that maturity of obedience, whose prayer is :—"O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me ; nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt."

We, too, who desire to follow our Leader, ought to begin, and continue, in order to end our lives with Him. It was a mistake on the part of Peter to take a generous impulse as proof that he was strong enough then to follow His Master even to prison or to death. Many others have made the same mistake. The wisdom of our Lord seeks to save

us from such folly. He checks and rebukes our imprudence, that He may give timely discipline to our courage and patience. Fiery trials must not be strange. Our faith would fail were such trials to come upon us unforeseen. "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

As to Jesus, so to every one of His disciples,—there is the world as it exists when he is born into it, there is the period of humble preparation for more trying service, there is service to try the ripening virtues ;—and, in the Lord's time, the crisis of death—the bitter cup which is our natural dread, but which come in what form it may, is to be accepted as the Father's will. All is foreseen. For all the disciple is to be graciously prepared ;—that he may salute his trial with the Lord's composure and submission, saying :—*O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me except I drink it, Thy will be done.*

## XI.

NOW THANKS BE UNTO GOD, WHICH ALWAYS CAUSETH US TO TRIUMPH IN CHRIST. *2 Cor ii. 14.*

THE Cross means suffering; it means triumph also. Human duty as made known by our Lord is seen to demand sacrifices:—not sacrifices for their own sake, but sacrifices for love's sake; not sacrifices of a servile and poverty-stricken nature, but sacrifices worthy of man's possessions and God's promises,—sacrifices in the spirit and after the example of Christ. But, “who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges?” Who exposes himself to hardship, to losses, to casualties, to death, and does not expect to have joy in the fruit of his labors? Certainly not the Captain of our salvation, not the soldier who fights under His Banner.

Ordinary wars have no guarantee of what and how great their success shall be; but the good fight of faith is not like them in this respect, having all the promises of God in its favor. Not only do these promises set before the followers of Jesus a future success above all that they ask or think; the promises are confirmed by a present foretaste of what their fulfilment is to be. The Lord saw His disciples again, as He had said; and, showing Himself alive after His Passion, the Heir of the eternal Father, He touched their spirits with a sense of immortality. Then it was they began to know the life to come, the joy and felicity of martyrs after they have once died. Then all the promises of God became yea in Christ, and in Him Amen. Nothing could be more positive. Their hope was so assured and substantiated to the disciples by the sight of their risen Lord, that they rose from the dead by anticipation,

triumphed in the flames of persecution, and made small account comparatively of the times and seasons through which the struggles of the faith might be prolonged, since the final conquest was sure.

Still how bitter is the thought of dying, and how repulsive are the approaches to that change! How chill and terrible is the shadow of death that falls upon us in the departure of some one from our side! Think of this, and then say, if we have studied and felt as we ought the truth of our Lord's resurrection? What is done for us by the resurrection of our Lord from the dead? To what hope are we begotten by that glorious fact? We must get our answer by learning the fact, and what it means in connection with other facts in our Lord's revelation.

Imagine a king building a triumphal arch to commemorate the great doings of his reign. Would he lay all the



stones in fair colors, having them perfectly fitted to one another, and leave out the keystone that is to complete all and hold all together? Without the keystone there is no arch. Without the resurrection of our Lord,—our Lord is crucified, dead, and buried. In other words, we have no Lord. Our faith is vain. No forgiveness of sins is preached in the name of a king no longer alive; and immortality is not brought to light in the divinest human soul, if that soul be left in the grave, and that holy one see corruption.

But now is Christ risen. Immortality in the Christian sense is not a vague theory, not a brave philosophy trying to argue down anxieties by showing how little we know, and pointing out that dying may bring us to a future better than the present. Immortality in the risen Christ is immortality in broad daylight, immortality in a well-known person surviving death and dying

no more. The immortal King takes up again the broken body, that with it He may again hail His followers in the salutation of peace, and fulfil their joy in the assurance of His joy. He will ascend to His Father and their Father. They shall know him no more after the flesh. But He is living and reigning. Through the Holy Spirit of promise He will endue them with power from on high. He will be with them always; and, after they shall have borne their testimony for Him according to the teaching and moving of His Spirit, they too being absent from the body shall be both alive in spirit and present with the Lord. His triumph is the triumph of all in whom the divine Spirit lives and rules; while their triumph is His again by its being theirs.

' Was it easy work for the first disciples to believe all this,—and to believe it more and more as they thought and remembered and had the Scriptures

opened to them? Was it strange if at first they believed not for joy and wonder? Can we blame Thomas for refusing to yield assent to any common testimony in a matter of such infinite importance? or be offended that, when the eleven saw their risen Lord in Galilee, according to His appointment, though all worshipped Him, some doubted? If faith works wonders on the hearts and through the efforts of men, is not faith itself the greatest wonder of all—the very power and wisdom of God in the human soul?

Mark how our Lord set himself to teach His disciples anew after his resurrection. He sees them again; but, during the forty days, it is not very often that they see Him, nor are his visits long. The very body through which He addresses Himself to their senses is changed. It is no longer a mortal body. Mortality is swallowed up of life. The risen Saviour is alive forevermore. No

second death hath power over Him. He is not delivered back to natural relations and customary labors—like Lazarus and the widow's son of Nain. He has not returned to show the heavenly things to those who did not believe Him when He was teaching them of earthly things. Indeed He makes no appeal whatever to that easy credulity, which delights in miraculous signs, because it knows little or nothing of solid conviction.

On the contrary, from the height of His eternal power, and while showing the disciples that though alive He is not to be habitually known and embraced by the senses, He gives all diligence to make the disciples recognize Him in spirit and in truth. As long as they are slow to know Him in His wisdom, His love, His constancy, His submission to the Father, His satisfaction in His accomplished self-sacrifice,—it is with rebuke for their unbelief that He appears in their presence, announces Himself

in familiar words and acts, shows them His hands and His feet. But, when their hearts burn within them as, unrecognized by their senses, He is communicating with their spirits—talking with them by the way and opening to them the Scriptures ; then how much it is to their quickened faith, that He is known of them in the breaking of bread, though only to vanish out of their sight.

Forty days He is watching to give His disciples the final and most difficult lessons in the faith ; teaching them to know Him—not as they had known Him in the body,—but in the power of His resurrection. They are to be made sure that He is with them again,—the same spiritual person, witnessing to the same truth, as before they had known the fellowship of His sufferings.

Wonderful was the Lord's victory in the souls of His disciples. Before His ascension, they had not only again looked upon Jesus their Teacher and

Friend—they had seen the Ghrist their Lord with spiritual eyes. His ascension opened heaven to them. Their King was at the right hand of the Father. To die was a momentary pang ; to live was Christ—eternal felicity and triumph with Him in the welfare of mankind. As Stephen the first martyr among the disciples saw the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God ; as he died, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit ; so, in all ages, the faithful witnesses have welcomed death,—have triumphed over it, and made a gain of it. The grave became a vestibule of the Father's house, adorned with symbols of light, peace, joy—the sweet anticipations of the heavenly home. The Spirit of truth, moving in the souls of disciples as on the day of Pentecost, is ever awakening them to the life of the resurrection. As the outward man is perishing, the inward man is renewed day by day. Death with the

grave following after, that threatened the disciple with the loss of all things, till the disciple was stirred up to lay hold on eternal life, appears at last as the angel of deliverance to the soul weary of its prison and its pain. *O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

## XII.

THEN COMETH THE END, WHEN HE SHALL HAVE DELIVERED UP THE KINGDOM TO GOD, EVEN THE FATHER; WHEN HE SHALL HAVE PUT DOWN ALL RULE, AND ALL AUTHORITY AND POWER.—1 *Cor.* xv. 24.

OUR Lord's victory over death was not for Himself alone, but for all men as belonging to Him. He goes on from conquering to conquer. He repeats His triumph in every soul that departs this life in the true faith of His holy name. And, if any die in unbelief, still His is the victory. He is the resurrection of the unjust as well as of the just; and, if the unjust are unjust still, refusing the life of purity and blessedness, it is for no lack of effort or sufficiency on His part. The Saviour is the Saviour of all men. But then all men must work with



the Saviour, or He will of course be the Saviour "especially of those that believe."

Therefore, "what shall I do?" which, to be sure, is the great question of the hour, of the day, of the lifetime in the body, is great at last with the greatness of an immortal destiny; great, not because a man can do much at first, or much in a long time,—not even because one can ever finish a particular work that shall be very important in itself; but great for the reason that, while we can do absolutely nothing without God, God can do very great things with us, weak creatures as we are. The good to come of our least work as of our greatest, depends upon our doing what God would have us do.

What shall I do that God may enable me to get on well in this world? In what way will the Father of all use my efforts in providing food for me and for all His children? And, since God feeds

the body that the soul may thrive, what shall I do to nourish myself and others in wisdom? How shall I live by whatever word God sends me, and give His words to others that they may live by them also? There is for us always a docile and obedient questioning, which is godliness; and godliness hath the promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.

We cannot inquire in vain; because He who prompts our questioning provides for our instruction. There is the Great Teacher and the great example. What does the Son of God ask me to do as His disciple, as a citizen of His kingdom? By what schooling, in what fellowship is He offering to teach me? To what degree of well-doing is He proposing to lead me on? All is in the simple—"what shall I do?"

We see that no sooner is man made than he is set to work with God; and we are told of no period in God's eternity

when He will cease to work with man. Jesus said: "my Father worketh hitherto, and I work;" and the disciples of Jesus led by the spirit of truth are working still, and still asking, "what shall we do that we may work the works of God?" "What shall I do?" is the question of every man's physical necessity and of every man's spiritual understanding. Day by day, from generation to generation, from age to age, the unending inquiry is pressed; while from the voices of nature, from the dictates of society, through lawgivers and prophets, men take commands of God. The world is the common school. The Lord Jesus is the Great Teacher. The experience of life here below is man's preparatory discipline; the kingdom of God above his eternal inheritance. To be is to be under God's government.

What shall I do? The inquiry is not only appropriate to all men, not only in order at every instant and reaching on

forever, connecting each pulse of life with the service that knows no end ; but the question is one of infinite hope—in God. Having begun with making us natural men, what does that mean but that He has an end in our creation, which He will gain by making us spiritual men ? To make men as good and glorious as it is possible to make them : was not this the purpose of our Lord at His first coming ? Is he to fail ? God forbid. The New Testament tells us of a second appearing of our Lord, not as at the first to make disciples of a few, but as at the last to be glorified in the hosts of His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe. Having undertaken man's spiritual training, He will not give it up until the end be reached.

And what is the end ? Is it the end of the world ? Let us say, at least, the end of the present order of nature in human society, the end of natural births and natural deaths, the end of our Lord's

effort as Mediator between God and man, to communicate the divine law and life to the immature, the ignorant, the wicked of the human race. But why the end of all this? Simply because all this shall have been fulfilled, the last child of Adam shall have been born, and shall have been taught. Through the mediation of Christ every human being from first to last shall have been brought to know and take his own place under the government of the Father—each one to receive according to what he has done.

We must consider, also, that in the language of endless life the end of what is passing means the consummation of what is permanent. Things that are perishable, things made to serve the Father's purpose for a time, come by and by to the last of their service: the transitory earth and heaven are shaken at length just once more, and then they are forever removed—gone beyond recall; while the things that

cannot be shaken alone remain. This present world is good for its purpose, beautiful in its season ; but this world tosses us on troublesome waves, that we may learn to find our rest in God. When our God shall have taught us to trust in Him, and shall have trained us to hear His voice in the storm ; when all His waves and billows shall have served the purpose of His love,—then, no more sea ! Then, quietness and assurance forever ! Then, the human family, that sank low, shall have mounted high,

“Through the dear might of Him that walked the waves.”

Yes, the end cometh ; the end, which means discontinuance only for what is not fit to last, and lasting for all that is worthy to continue ; the end, for which all means were called into requisition ; the end, which is reached as the result of our Lord’s mediatorial reign : all enemies subdued—God all in all.

The end cometh—when ? In what

year of our Lord? Is it for us to know? Shall we seek a limit for the ages during which the Captain of our salvation shall be bringing many sons unto glory? If God be for us, and the Son of God be content to serve as our Leader, shall we grudge our pains in the great cause, and pray that the time may be shortened? Did all the good before our Lord's first advent die in faith—longing for the days which we see? And cannot we die in faith, longing for the days of the Lord's final revelation and glory, which they and we shall see together? Rather let us rejoice in hope, because the Father hath put the times and the seasons in His own power, not in our weakness. Human destiny is a short and pitiful story, when contemplated apart from the patience and power of God. We must not so contemplate it. To us there is faith and hope. We are to believe in God and in Jesus Christ our Lord. Far off as the land of promise may be,

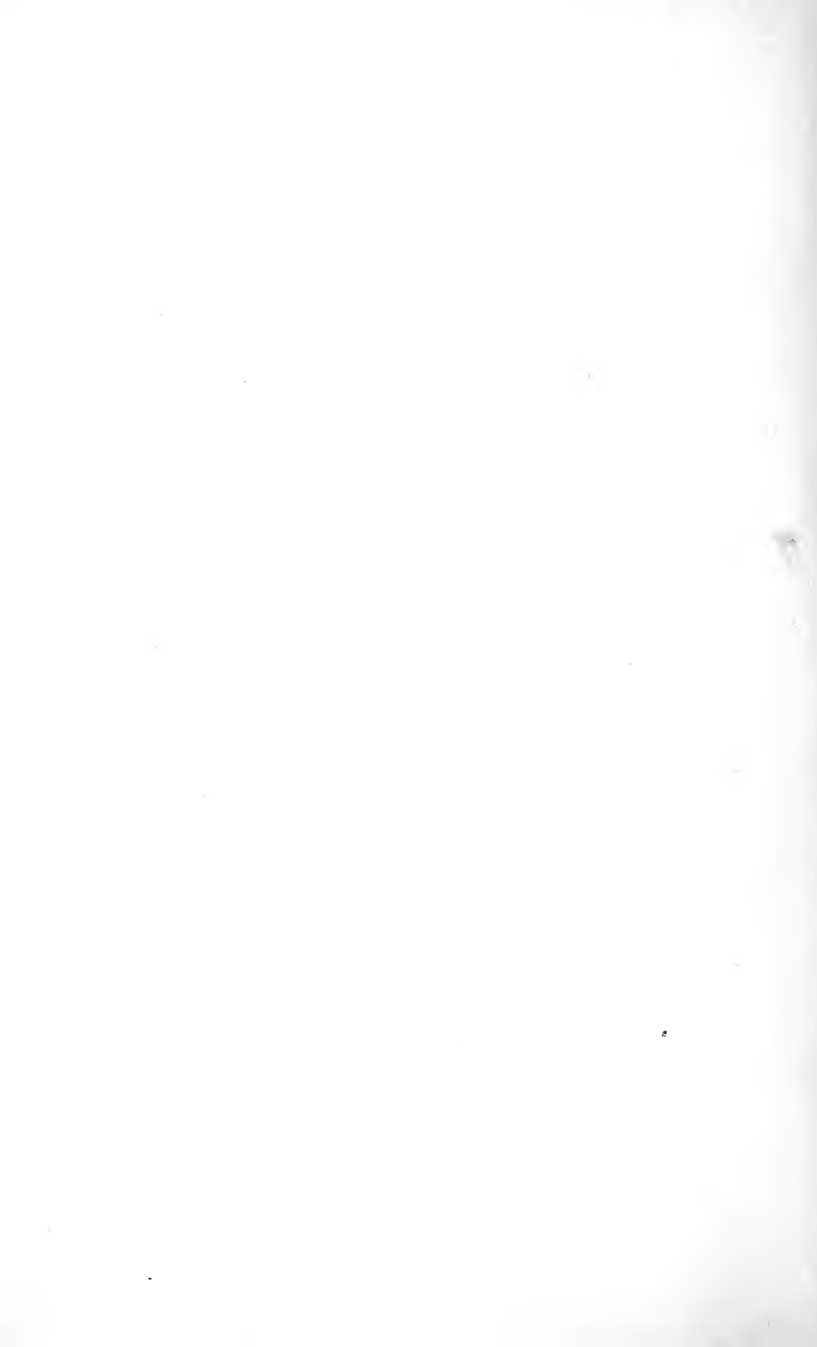
let us journey till we reach it—till we come to the place which our Lord has gone to prepare, to the city of God and the house not made with hands. Let nations and kingdoms arise and prosper, and be judged and disappear from their places ; let millenniums wear away and the world wax old as doth a garment, till the grace of the fashion of it perisheth ; yet the Lord is not slack concerning His promise, but is long-suffering to us ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

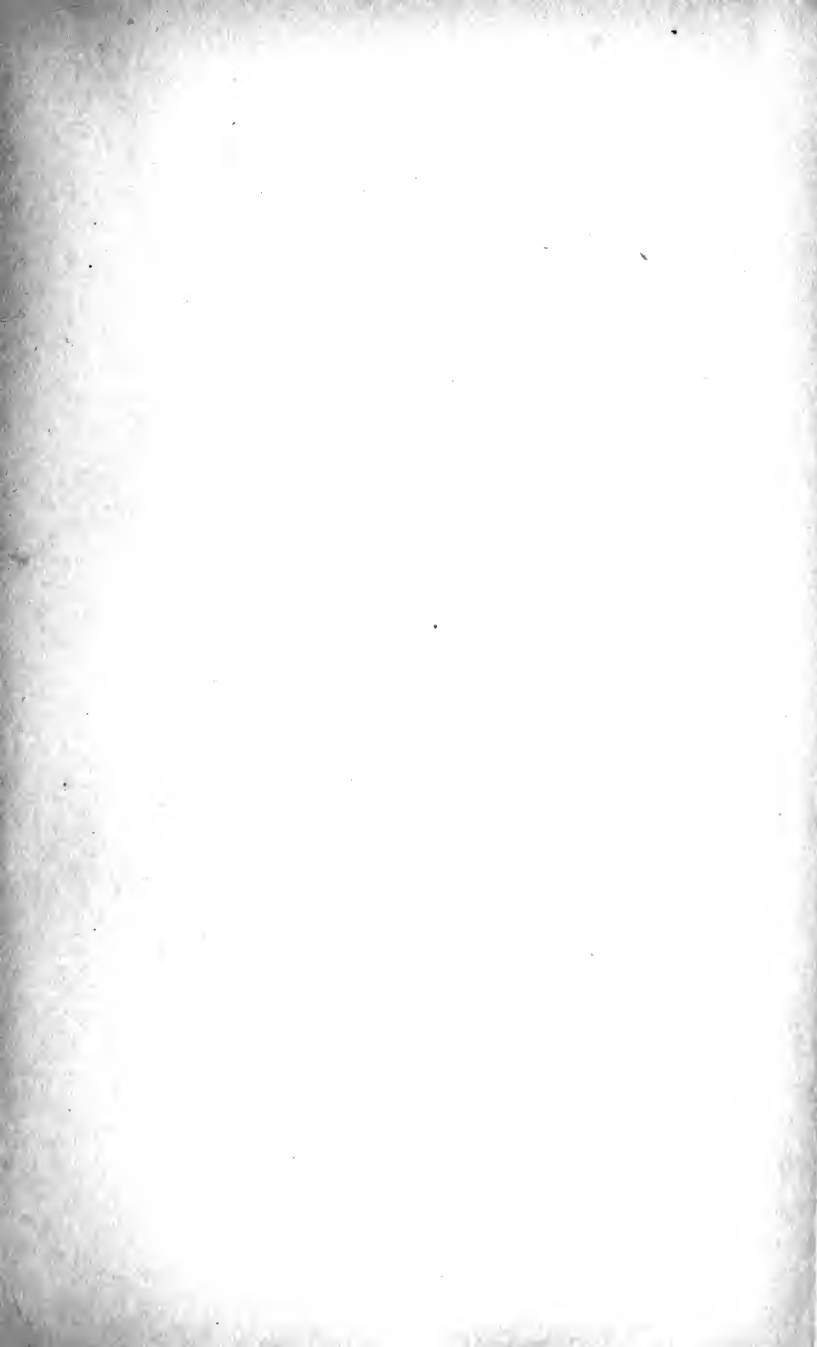
Meanwhile, what you do, and what I do, let it be done as befits an heir of the Father's kingdom, a dutiful child of the Father's family. For, if the Father has not advanced our bodies or our souls in life on earth without our active co-operation, certainly he will not mature us in heavenly character and receive us to an everlasting mansion without our working with Him. He will use our dili-



gence, employ our judgment, consult our taste about our heavenly home, as really as He does the same about our earthly dwelling. What must be, then, the eternal significance of that exhortation of St. Paul :

*" Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."*







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